* If you love someone, you talk with them and you talk about them.
* If you don’t talk with them or talk about them, you don’t really love them the way you should.

*•*

* If you love Jesus, you talk with Him (prayer) & you talk about Him (evangelism).
* Your prayer life and your soul winning efforts tell you exactly how much you love Jesus.
* Some Christians are in love with the ministry, but not with the Master.
* They talk about missions, theology, church growth, discipleship, etc.
* But they rarely pray and they rarely witness.
* It's because they don't love Jesus the way they should.
* How did the early Christians take the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome in only 30 years?
* The early Christians prayed and witnessed all the time.
* They learned to pray from Jesus.
* The only thing they ever asked Jesus to teach them was “to pray.” (Luke 11:1)

*•*

* Why is prayer so important?
* Why does prayer need to become the priority of every Southern Baptist?
* What happens…

**“When God’s People Pray”**

NAU **Acts 4:23-37**

1. When God’s People Pray, **They Overcome Persecution (23a).**

# 23a – “When they had been released…”

* Peter and John been had been released from prison.
* (Tell about Peter and John and the lame man)
* Acts 4:1-4 tells us that the response to Peter’s sermon was two-fold:
* The Sadducees and other religious leaders had Peter, John and the lame man arrested.
* Many others believed in Christ, and the number of believers in Jerusalem rose to 5,000 men (plus their family members).
* Peter, John and the lame man spent the night in jail.
* The next day they were brought into the Sanhedrin (describe).
  + Annas and Caiaphas and others “placed them in the center” (a power move for the purpose of intimidating them).
  + It didn’t work!
  + They asked, “By what power, or in what name have you done this?”
  + Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, replied…

# “Rulers and elders, if we are on trial for the benefit done to a sick man, as to how he has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this name this man stands before you in good health.” (Acts 4:8-10)

* Then **(Acts 4:11)** Peter quoted Psalm 118:22 saying, **“(Jesus) is the STONE**

# WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER STONE.”

*•*

# Then in Acts 4:12, Peter lowered the boom… “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

* The members of the Sanhedrin noticed the “confidence” (“freedom of speech”) of Peter and John.

# V. 13 - “They realized that were uneducated (Gr. agrammatos) and untrained (Gr. idiotos) men, they were amazed. And they began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”

* Peter and John had not been trained by their rabbis.
* But Peter had been trained by the greatest of all rabbis – Jesus! (They were “homeschooled” by Jesus for 3½ yrs!).
* They looked at the man standing in front that had been healed, and they could say nothing.
* The apostles had silenced them just as Jesus had silenced them so many times during His earthly ministry.
* They called an emergency “executive session.”

*•* (Read vv. 15-20)

* That’s when Peter and John had been “released” (v. 23).
* Praying Christians will be persecuted, but in time they will be released – either literally or eternally!

# Either way, “When God’s People Pray, They Overcome Persecution!”

1. When God’s People Pray, **They Enjoy Unity (23-24a, 32a).**

# 23-24a - When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord.

**32a - And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul.**

* + **“They went to their own companions”** - They gathered together with the body of Christ!
  + They gave a report of what had happened with the Sanhedrin.
  + Then they all lifted their voices to God in unison!

# “They lifted their voices to God WITH ONE ACCORD.”

* + **“One accord” – Gr. ὁμοθυμαδόν** - *with one mind; one purpose; one impulse.*
  + V. **32 - the congregation (πλῆθος –** {Eng. Plethora} *large number, multitude*, *crowd, assembly*, *community, church, fellowship***) of those who believed were of one heart and soul.**
  + When they prayed, they enjoyed unity!

# Southern Baptists could use a dose of that!

* + Unity in the SBC will not come via social media.
  + Twitter cannot produce unity; but prayer can!
  + Unity will not occur via divisive discourse.
  + But unity WILL come via unified prayer meetings.

# When we “lift (our) voices to God with one accord.”

* + When our **“congregation(s)** (assemblies, churches) **of those who believe are of one heart and soul.”**
  + THEN we will enjoy genuine unity in the SBC!
* We must lay down any and all personal agendas, and cry out to God together in prayer!

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# When God’s People Pray, They Enjoy Unity.

1. When God’s People Pray, **They Depend on Scripture (24-26).**

# 24-26 - And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, (Ex. 20:11; Neh.

9:6; Ps. 146:6**) 25 who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father**

# David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? 26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED

**TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST (MESSIAH; ANOINTED).' (**Psalm 2:1-2**)**

* When God’s people gathered, by faith they claimed the promises of Scripture when they prayed!
* They prayed the Word of God!
* They did just as Jesus had done when He prayed Scripture on the cross (Ps. 22:1

– “My God, My God…” & Ps. 31:5 – “Into Thy hands…”).

* They understood that the Word of God leads to the will of God!
* And when we pray the will of God, God hears and answers us!
* Their prayers were rooted in the Scriptures – the very Word of Almighty God!
* That's how Southern Baptists must pray – dependent on Scripture!
* We must pray for the **lost** (Rom. 10:1; John 16:8; Rom. 10:13; Acts 3:19).
* We must pray for our **churches** (Acts 9:31 – “Enjoy peace…”).
* We must pray for the POTUS (Prov. 21:1 – “The king’s heart…”).
* We must pray for **revival** (2 Chron. 7:13-14 – “If my people…”).
* We must pray for afresh filling of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:13 – “If you then being evil know how to give good gifts…)
* When God’s people pray, **They Depend on Scripture!!**

1. When God’s People Pray, **They Exude Confidence (27-28).**

# 27-28 - For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

* Prayer made them bold – not arrogant; not cocky; not egotistical; not smug; not conceited; not condescending!
* But bold, courageous and confident in the Lord!
* They realized that they were in the Sovereign hands of the God of the Universe!
* They knew that the ultimate Judge, God Almighty, was in charge of their lives – not the paltry members of Sanhedrin!
* They understood NAU **Psalm 31:15 – “(Lord) My times are in Your hand!”**
* Illus. – They were like young David before Goliath.
* Everybody else said Goliath was too big to hit.
* But David said, “He’s too big to miss!”
* David boldly said, “Big boy, you come to me with a sword, a spear and a javelin, but…”
* When God’s People Pray **They Exude Confidence!**

People Pray, **They Offer Strategic Petitions (29-30).**

**29-30 – “And now, Lord, take note of (ἐπεῖδον** *- fix Your gaze upon, look at, concern Yourself with***) their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal,**

# and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."

* 1st - they said, **“Lord, take note of their threats”** – write those in Your Ledger, Lord!”
* 2nd – **“Grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence”** – God answered that precisely (v. 31).

# 3rd – “While You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take

**place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."** They knew it wasn’t their hands that had healed that lame man – it was the LORD’s hand!

* And throughout the rest of the Book of Acts, God answered these three strategic petitions!
* Every persecutor’s actions were written down in heaven!
* The disciples spoke God’s word with “all confidence.”
* God’s hand was extended and people were healed, and signs and wonders took place in the name of Jesus!
* These disciples understood that When God’s People Pray, **They** Were to **Offer Strategic Petitions!!**

1. When God’s People Pray, **They Experience Miracles (31a)**

# 31a - And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken.

* God not only healed people, and performed signs and wonders in the days ahead!
* He also performed a miracle immediately!

# “When they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken.”

* God responded to their prayers!
* Their prayers moved the hand of Almighty God!
* God loved their prayers so much, he decided to lovingly shake them!
* Every husband understands this!
* Every parent understands this!
  + And every grandparent certainly understands this!
  + When you congratulate/greet/love on one of your family members, you don’t just hug them – you also shake them a little!
  + The Bible says that when Jesus cried, “TETELESTAI!” and released His spirit to His Father…

# NAU Matthew 27:51 - And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

* + That was God’s way of saying that He was well pleased with His Son!
  + And when God heard the fervent prayers of His persecuted people, He shook the entire building in which they were gathered!
  + Brethren, there has never been “a day of miracles,” but there has always been “a God of miracles!”
  + When God’s People Pray, **They Experience Miracles!**

God’s People Pray, **They Share the Gospel (31b, 33).**

# 31b - And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.

**33 - And with great power (μεγάλῃ δυνάμει) the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus!**

* + They weren’t tweeting critical comments about people!
  + They weren’t slandering others on podcasts!
  + They weren’t dividing people with contentious speech!
  + No, no, a thousand times no!
  + Instead, they were wading out into the sea of lost and hurting humanity all around them and telling them about Jesus!
  + Ex. – Estella (Sunday before last at Bellevue).
* Dr. Chuck Kelly – “If Jesus is in your heart, He'll come out of your mouth!”

*•*

* Dr. Roy Fish – “You can’t serve Jesus with a zipped lip!”

*•*

* Charles Spurgeon: “If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about

their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”

* Brethren, When God’s People Pray, **They Share the Gospel!**
  1. When God’s People Pray, **They Enjoy Bountiful Grace (33b).**

# And abundant grace (χάρις τε μεγάλη) was upon them all.

* They experience “MEGA-grace.”
* God’s grace is necessary for our salvation!
* God’s grace is also necessary for our sanctification!
* To COME to Christ, we must be “saved by grace”!
* To MATURE in Christ, we must “grow in grace…”
* Salvation is all of grace, from beginning to end!
* And God is able to pour out His “abundant (mega) grace” upon all of His children.

# “Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.

* **What can avail to wash it away?**
* **Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,**
* **Whiter than snow you may be today.**

**“Grace, grace, God’s grace,**

**Grace that will pardon and cleanse within; Grace, grace, God’s grace,**

**Grace that is greater than all our sin!”**

* When God’s People Pray, **They Enjoy Bountiful Grace**
  1. When God’s People Pray, **They Become Exceptionally Generous (32b, 34-35).**

# 32b - And not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

**34-35 - For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.**

* This was not an example of 1st Century “communism” or “socialism.”
* No one was being forced to relinquish their rights to property or possessions.
* Rather, the Holy Spirit was prompting them to be “exceptionally generous.”
* They were like the one that Paul referred to in **2 Cor. 9:7** as a **“cheerful (ἱλαρός) giver.”**

# They understood NAU Proverbs 22:9 – “He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.”

* God gave us His Son.
* Jesus gave us His life.
* The Holy Spirit gave us power and spiritual gifts.
* You’re never more like God than when you give!
* Every urge to be generous comes from God.
* Your flesh won’t tell you to give.
* Neither will the devil.
* If you have an urge to give, that's from the Holy Spirit!
* Go ahead and give before you talk yourself out of it!

*•*

* I’d rather get to heaven and hear God say, “Gaines, you gave too much,” than to hear Him say, “You didn’t give enough!”
* Great churches are not built on spare time and pocket change!
* When God’s People Pray, **They Become Exceptionally Generous!**
  1. When God’s People Pray, **Some Become Gifted Leaders (36-37).**

# 36-37 - Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostle’s feet.

* When the early believers prayed, God raised up new leaders!
* When we want a leader, we hire a headhunter!
* When God wants a leader, He gets His people praying!
* Barnabas became one of the greatest leaders in the early church!
* Barnabas was with Paul and three other prophets when God called Barnabas and Paul to missions.
* Barnabas helped mentor the Apostle Paul!!
* Paul would never have been the man of God he became without Barnabas!
* Barnabas also helped mentor John Mark!
* The first Gospel to be written was by John Mark.
* Matthew and Luke used it when they wrote their Gospels!
* Had it not been for Barnabas, we might not have had the first three Gospels of the NT!
* How did Barnabas come on the sceen?
* He was elevated to leadership when believers prayed!
* Every worker you need in your church is out there – you just need to pray them in!
* Every missionary the SBC needs to reach the world for Christ is out there – we just need to pray them in!
* We need fewer business meetings and more prayer meetings!
* The church was birthed in a prayer meeting, not a business meeting! (Cf. Acts 2)
* Missions was birthed in a prayer meeting, not a business meeting (Cf. Acts 13).
* When God wants something done, He gets His people praying!
* When God’s People Pray, **Some Become Gifted Leaders.**

# Conclusion:

* So how about it?
* Do we want the SBC to look like the Book of Acts?
* Or will we settle for less?
* Do we want to operate in our power, or in God’s power?
* Do we want to see multitudes saved?
* Do we want to see what God can do?
* Do we want to see a heaven sent revival?

*•*

* If so, let’s stop looking around and let's start looking up!
* Let’s not talk to each other so much, and start talking to Jesus!
* Let’s make our churches houses of prayer!
* Let’s make our families and our marriages a house of prayer!
* Let’s have more prayer meetings than we have business meetings!
* Let’s pray like it matters – because it DOES matter!
* The key to your Christian life is your prayer life!
* A day without prayer is a wasted day.
* Time spent with God in prayer is never wasted time.

*•*

* Little prayer, little power.
* Some prayer, some power.
* Much prayer, much power!
* What good is a prayerless preacher?
* What good is a prayerless church?
* What good is a prayerless missionary?
* What good is a prayerless seminary?
* What good is a prayerless professor/theologian?
* What good is a prayerless conservative!
* If you love someone, you talk with them.
* If you don’t talk with them, you don’t really love them.

# "Teach me to pray, Lord..."

* **“Down on my knees…”**